

# Daily News

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## Prison program gives greyhounds a new life

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*Editor's note: Graham Milldrum of the Daily News staff and Kelly Monroe of our sister newspaper, the Daily Record in Lawrenceville, recently had a rare opportunity to visit Robinson Correctional Center. This is the second of a series of stories based on that visit.*



***An inmate plays with one of the greyhounds during an exercise period at Robinson Correctional Center. The program brings together racing dogs and prisoners to help habituate the animals to living with people. (Kelly Monroe photo)***

Robinson Correctional Center teaches dogs to help people and people to help dogs in one of its in-house program.

The opportunity from Midwest Greyhound Adoption came as a bit of a surprise.

"None of us had really seen a greyhound dog," Warden Randy Grounds said.

The program takes greyhounds from racetracks, largely in Florida, and sends them to be trained at homes and prisons.

The Robinson prison took its first dogs in October of 2011 and have kept the program running since then.

The goal is "to familiarize the dog with being around humans, walking on tile floors and upstairs," she said.

Some of the dogs need physical therapy or medical care when they arrive, which inmates are trained to do.

Most have never interacted with people, said Assistant Warden Deedee Brookhart, living solely to race.

After the familiarization in the prison, they are adopted through Loving Arms Rehabilitation Kennel, which also screens the family accepting the dog.

All that have been through the program so far have been successfully adopted out, Brookhart said. Part of that is because the kennel makes sure the dog's personality matches with that of the owners. For example, she said some are uncomfortable around cats.

There are four dogs involved in the program at any one time, with nine inmates working with the animals. The ninth man is an alternate in case one of the inmates can't make it.

The dogs are trained in an area formed by fencing off the corner between two of the dormitory blocks, linking low chain fences to the inner security fence.

In this area, the animals can be let off their leashes and allowed to move around freely.

This also gives the inmates a chance to teach the commands like "sit, "lay down" and "come."

That last command is critical, Brookhart said, to keep the dogs from running away.

"They're sight hounds, so once they're gone they're gone," she said.

The dogs can reach speeds of to 40 mph, according to the Royal Veterinary College of London.

*(Story continued next page)*

Inmate John L. Carver said the having the dogs around helps inmates who are afraid of dogs. Since the animals are always collared and muzzled, it makes them look safer to people who are afraid of them.

(Brookhart said muzzling is more for the dog's health than any risk to the inmates. They will nip at each other and their thin skin makes them vulnerable to injury.)

Carver said he is often approached while walking the animals around by other inmates asking if they are safe to touch.

He's glad to have the other inmates pet and grow used to the dogs, and thinks having them is a help to general inmate morale.

He had a pet dog before his incarceration, like several of the other members of the group.

George L. Guynn, 53, raised hunting dogs on the outside and finds this a way to continue that connection with animals.

Inmate William J. Golliher, 23, said it's good to know their efforts help people.

He said one thing he was proud of was training the previous dogs who went to live with an autistic child as a therapy animal.

They've had to make one major adjustment for the dogs, Brookhart said. When the animals first arrived the inmates wanted to work with them so much the dogs became cranky from being tired.

As a result, there is mandatory dog nap time.